

Parents' Voice in Government School Education

March 2020

Introduction

Parents Victoria (PV) is in its 95th year of being the peak non-profit body representing parent associations and the collective voice of parents in Victorian government schools - advocating for quality public education for all.

PV's policy reflects over many years, our expectations of Victorian Government, to build and sustain our schools to community expectations. For an insight, please find PV policy summary points below:

- **Under New Schools** - Parents Victoria believes that the Department of Education should plan according to growth and decay patterns, and that Regional Priority Review Committees (R.P.R.C.) should be in regular discussion with the Department of Education (Statistics), Department of Housing and other relevant bodies.
- **Under Upgraded Schools** - Parents Victoria believes that adequate resources should be made available to refit and upgrade existing Government schools, to ensure that students in these schools are not disadvantaged, relative to the buildings and facilities provided in new schools which are built to current building and facilities standards.
- **Under Old Schools** – Parents Victoria believes that it is an urgent task for Federal and State Governments to tackle the huge backlog of schools requiring renewal or refurbishment, if children are to learn in a satisfactory environment.

@ 2020 this remains an issue

- **Under Design of Buildings** - Parents Victoria believes that schools should be designed so that they use maximum natural light and ventilation and, where appropriate, are provided with heating, cooling or ventilation.

- **Under Maintenance** - Parents Victoria emphasises the importance and economic sense of all school buildings being regularly maintained.
 - (a) Direct grants to schools should make sufficient provision for minor maintenance.
 - (b) All regions must be able to carry out a regular cyclic maintenance program to ensure that school buildings are kept in good condition.
 - (c) Criteria for funding 'minor works and maintenance' should be extended to allow applications for improved cooling systems and air conditioning for all schools.

PV welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's inquiry into the Victorian Auditor-General's Report No. 253: **Managing School Infrastructure.**

1. PV's experience of school infrastructure management in Victoria

- PV wishes to acknowledge the Andrews Government's commitment to build new, and to rebuild, public schools in our State. There has been a huge injection of funding for capital works projects and undertaking to get the maintenance back-log up to speed.
- PV remains dissatisfied in regard to the higher level of funding going to the non- government school sector. This is unfair and is taking money away from public schools which are supporting a larger percentage of vulnerable students and their families.

2. The role played by PV to advocate for the development of school infrastructure assets

- PV advises and advocates for public schools and contributes to State Government consultations where possible.
<https://www.parentsvictoria.asn.au/online-library1/submissions/129-national-school-funding-march-2014-parents-victoria-submission/file>
- We are active members of our national body Australian Council of State School Organisations and contribute feedback at the national level <http://www.acsso.org.au/index.php/portfolio/submissions>
- PV provides guidance and support to public school parents seeking improved school infrastructure in their school communities i.e. Support Letters to Government and other matters requiring urgent attention.
- PV keeps parents informed about Victorian Government commitments and future initiatives post Victorian State Budgets.
- PV responds to Media requests.

3. Any collaboration undertaken between PV and the Victorian School Building Authority (VSBA) or Department of Education and Training (DET)

- PV representation on numerous DET advisory committees and reference groups i.e. Tech Schools Expert Advisory Group; SRP Consultative Committee.
- PV representation on VSBA advisory committees i.e. School Contract Cleaning and consultation on related topics. They are responsible for – i.e. School Zones; Find My School; School Maintenance; Asbestos.
- Liaison with DET/VSBA when parent community members raise local concerns regarding new, renewal and maintenance projects
- Effective and timely community engagement remains of significant importance on projects, but ongoing support should be prioritised where communities transitioning to new arrangements are experiencing challenges and impact.
- The VSBA website clearly says they are a division of the Department of Education and Training (DET), established in 2016, to oversee the design and construction of new schools and early childhood centres, as well as the modernisation and upgrade of existing ones. VSBA is made up of building experts, project managers, architects and specialists in relocatable buildings, community engagement and asbestos removal. They are also responsible for running a number of grant programs for schools and early childhood centres: Children's Capital Grants Program; Inclusive Schools Fund; Non-Government Schools Capital Fund; and Shared Facilities Fund.
- VSBA administers the Non-Government Schools Capital Fund and the Independent School sector and Catholic School sector both have their respective bodies, Victorian Independent Schools BGA Ltd and Catholic Capital Grants (Vic) Pty Ltd (noting both these bodies are registered charities with ACNC) so independence and accountability is questioned by public school advocates, especially in regard to a transparent and fair process for capital works approval. Refer Operation Guidelines here <https://is.vic.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/vicdet-operational-guidelines-1.pdf>

4. How the VSBA and DET can more effectively prioritise school maintenance and the development of school infrastructure assets

PV's overall concern has always been and continues to be - the responsible decision maker not having any internal or external political influence on the decision - that public schools are prioritised and all applications are based on need and urgency.

PV restates these important points extracted from 2017 Audit
Source: <https://www.audit.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/20170511-School-Infrastructure.pdf>

Page 4 > The guiding legislation for Victorian schools—the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (the Act)—provides a right for every school-age child to enrol at his or her neighbourhood government school. It also allows students to choose other government schools where there is available space.

Page 24 > “DET needs a reliable method of comparing available places with likely future demand. This involves forecasting future demographic patterns for each neighbourhood, the number of school-aged children, and the likelihood of parents choosing a public education. Forecasts should extend far enough into the future to allow enough time to build new schools if required.”

Page 27 > DET incorporates into the five-year pipeline the new schools that government has promised to build through election commitments and other announcements. DET provides this pipeline to government as advice on the priority schools to build over the next five-years. DET does not assess the extent to which government commitments are meeting demand pressures.

Page 28 > Currently, 52.3 per cent of government primary school enrolments and 53.3 per cent of government secondary school enrolments come from outside the local school catchment.

Government needs to work harder to build public confidence about all our Public Schools.

Page 51 > For the past 10 years, funding for maintenance has been well below industry standards, which has contributed to the degradation of school buildings. The funding is also well below the funding needed to bring assets up to a condition that will be more cost-effective to maintain.

Some schools are making up the shortfall for the costs of asset maintenance. In our 2014 audit, we found that during the previous year, parents contributed almost \$52 million to Victorian government schools. This is almost \$35 000 per school. DET has no oversight of the extent to which these funds have been used for maintenance. Without adequate funding, schools will continue to postpone much needed repairs, prioritise reactive rather than preventative maintenance, and struggle to maintain assets effectively.

PV feels strongly about effective **School Governance and Community Engagement** and there needs to be a high level of publicness and capacity building and technical capability for those responsible to govern and strategically plan for the school's future. DET *Improving School Governance (ISG)* modules clearly state the role and responsibilities of School Councils. On pages 8 it clearly says “School councils hold a duty under the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 to ensure that the school, as a workplace, is, so far as reasonably practicable, safe and without risks to health.” For some of our current schools, this could be easily challenged and is another reason why regular school maintenance is essential. Pages 15, 19, 29 and 39 explain the expected roles of Principal, School Council and the VSBA. Source: <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/governance/governancepdf.pdf>

Supporting our School Leaders

PV in particular wants to express clearly that “DET is responsible for ensuring that the assets of Victorian schools are managed efficiently and effectively. DET delegates its responsibility to school principals and requires them to create, implement and manage a plan for the development and general maintenance of school buildings and grounds.” Source: <https://www.audit.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2018-07/20180726-School-Councils.pdf>

If school principals are not supported by their employer to execute these expected obligations then the Employer (DET) is accountable for that inaction. Concerns are constantly expressed and raised by the Victorian Principal organisations and the Australian Education Union Principal Class in this regard and should not be ignored.

Principals have advised us the **School facilities Profile** website could be more supportive in terms of (a) correct plans and (b) useful tools (that are quick and easy) for planned school maintenance and repairs.

Public Private Partnerships

Source: <https://www.dtf.vic.gov.au/partnerships-victoria-ppp-projects/partnerships-victoria-schools-project>

There is a significant difference in workloads between normal schools and public-private-partnership (PPP) schools, where all maintenance/cleaning management is looked after. Refer Schedule 24 Services Specification document p 69 re cleaning services [file:///C:/Users/Gail/Documents/DET%202020/PViS Schedule 24 Services Specification.pdf](file:///C:/Users/Gail/Documents/DET%202020/PViS%20Schedule%2024%20Services%20Specification.pdf)

International & Interstate examples:

From USA:

Source: <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-k-12/reports/2019/02/12/466104/case-federal-funding-school-infrastructure/>

“As part of these funding provisions, Congress should mandate that states and districts identify how to spend modernization funds so that they are equitably distributed across school districts. For example, District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) provides information on its website about its own capital improvement plan, known as the DCPS School Modernization process.¹⁷ This process uses four considerations, in descending order of importance: equity; student demand; neighbourhood population; and building condition.¹⁸ Equity in particular assesses the percentage of schools in the neighbourhood that have been modernized, as well as the percentage of enrolled students who are at-risk, have disabilities, or are English language learners.”

From NSW:

Source: <https://www.audit.nsw.gov.au/our-work/reports/planning-for-school-infrastructure>

In response to this challenging situation, the Department has recently developed a School Assets Strategic Plan (Strategic Plan) designed to accommodate the expected student population up to 2031. This is the first such plan for the Department. It is a good plan.

The Department now has a Plan to meet future needs

The Department recently developed a Strategic Plan designed to ensure that there are sufficient fit-for-purpose places for students where and when required up to 2031. The Strategic Plan outlines the:

- predicted demand for future learning spaces
- condition of existing infrastructure and additional infrastructure and maintenance required
- proposed new initiatives to deliver the required infrastructure economically
- proposed new cluster planning model to determine priorities and initiatives to be implemented at the school level
- funding needed to provide appropriate learning spaces where and when needed.

5. Any significant developments since the tabling of the Auditor-General's report in September 2016

Population growth continues to boom and Victoria and Victorian Government have acknowledged the challenges.

Source <https://www.infrastructurevictoria.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Growing-Victorias-Potential-April-2019.pdf>

"The major cost constraint to development in established areas is the cost and availability of land for multiple uses, such as schools and open space (including for sport and recreation)."

"[Victoria's auditor-general said in 2017](#) a booming population meant the number of school aged children would increase by around 90,000 by 2021."

Last year there was discussion about international student numbers in Victoria. The Minister wanting to boost numbers and the Opposition calling for the introduction of overseas enrolment caps on individual schools and saying:

"We have to remember that primarily, government schools are there for students who live in their local area and that needs to remain a priority."

<https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/push-to-increase-overseas-students-following-enrolment-freeze-20190501-p51j58.html>

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-05-01/international-student-freeze-in-victorian-state-schools/11061342>

A picture is worth a thousand words!

PV has over the years expressed that local families must be able to access their local Public School. But that can be extremely difficult when they're closed - and down the road, the Private School is having more new facilities built!



These recent photos taken in Outer Eastern Metropolitan Region. Top Left: Parkwood Secondary College, North Ringwood closed end of 2012 and only some buildings remain for community group use. Top Right: Melba Secondary College (Junior Campus - formerly Croydon Secondary College) closed end of 2017 and whole site demolished in recent weeks. Bottom Left and Right is Yarra Valley Grammar, North Ringwood, a private school that continues to expand its facilities.

Media Example

Source: <https://www.heraldsun.com.au/education/schools-hub/caulfield-grammar-school-selling-1500-naming-rights-to-new-stadium-seats/news-story/2438bc98b745f83964b8a6318f76544d>

Background to story...

Caulfield Grammar School is selling off seats to its new \$25million aquatic centre for \$1500 a pop while 4km away Caulfield South Primary School is seeking out funds by selling icy poles on Fridays and running sausage sizzles in a bid to upgrade the school.

Caulfield Grammar's foundation raised \$500,000 from 626 donors in 2019.

In the newsletter the Caulfield South Primary School talks about watching schools around it, being upgraded. It is seeking some help from MP David Southwick.

PV provided these comments:

Firstly, the Grammar gets at least 80% of its SRS, Student Resource Standard, from the Federal Government and probably close to 25% of the SRS from the State. Whilst the public school receives at best 20% of the SRS from the Federal Government and 75% from the State. (Yes, that's under the full amount). This is the disparity which our National Organisation (ACSSO) continues to push against with its mantra of the FST - a Fair, Simple & Transparent funding model. In the meantime the overfunded private schools continue with their oblivious, entitled attitude and the public system remains, for the most part, underfunded.

The second point, is the "competition" between public schools for State funds. Each MP gets a certain amount of discretionary funding for school infrastructure in the public system. Schools within that area then have to pitch against each other to try to get funds for what we would consider basic upgrades. With a limited amount it means that some schools will always miss out, particularly in needier areas. Depressingly, these schools then see wealthy public schools in other areas getting additional funding for facility upgrades and additions, when their students don't even have one netball court, let alone three new ones. Or toilets with closing doors, let alone a new theatre. This is the despicable downfall of our state expenditure system.

The state school having to seek help from the local member prompts the question - **who decides who gets what & when, in government funding for facilities** - especially when the Grammar has many more resources compared to the state primary school?

Additional

PV supports the VCOSS submission to this inquiry <https://vcoss.org.au/policy/managing-school-infrastructure/> We applaud the work of Community Hubs in Victoria and Our Place Model (Doveton College) as they embed family and community engagement in their learning environments.

PV acknowledges and concurs with the recommendations and concerns shared with us by Our Children, Our Schools (OCOS). This alliance has been a voice of many parents wanting access to a neighbourhood public school.

Gail

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